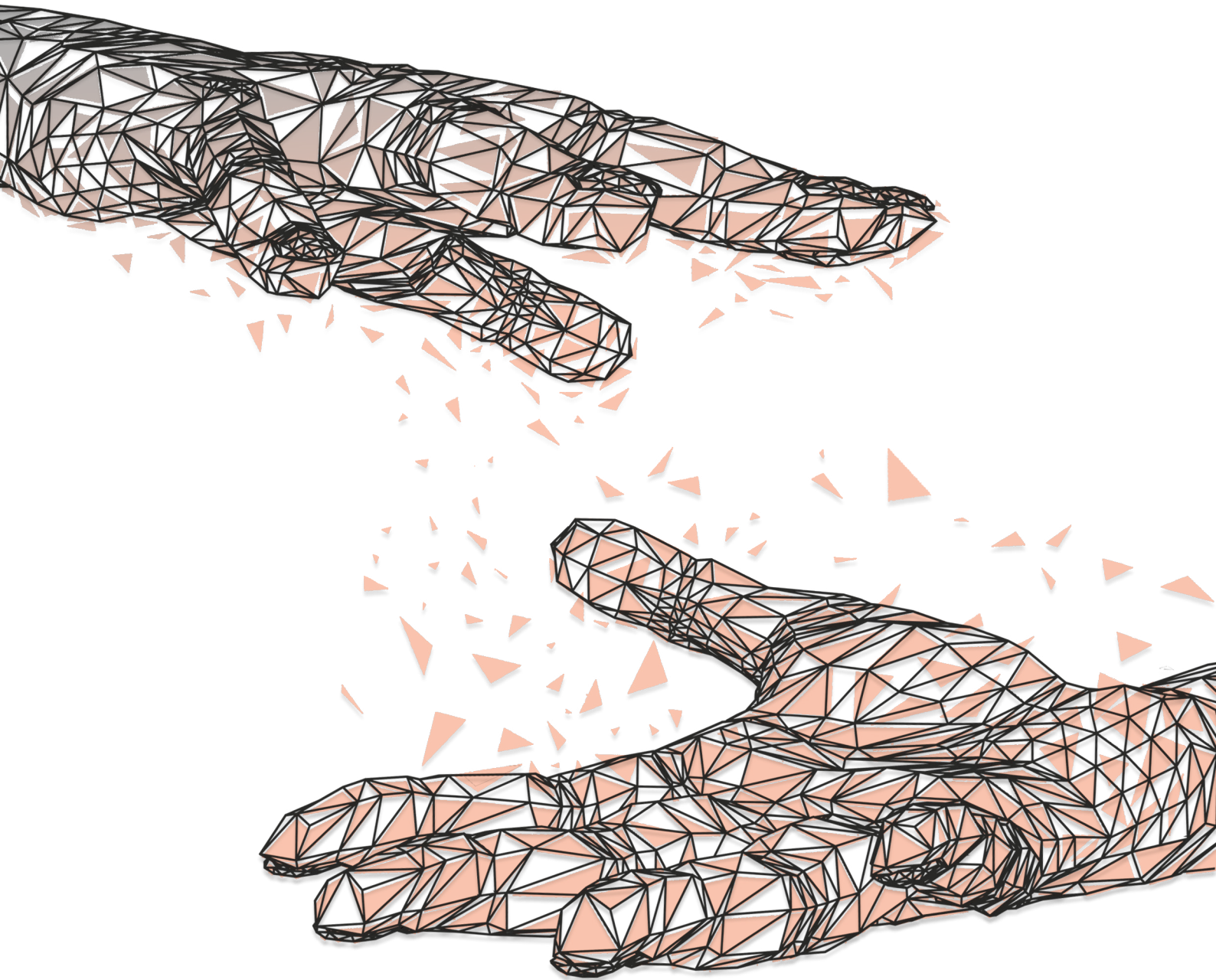


COUNSELLING PRACTITIONER BEGINNER TO ADVANCED



ABRAHAM MASLOW'S
CONTRIBUTIONS TO
HUMANISTIC **PSYCHOLOGY**

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Who was Abraham Maslow and what were his contributions to the world of counselling and psychology?

It's been suggested that Abraham Maslow was one of the most influential psychologists throughout the twentieth century. His most significant recorded works were his contributions to humanistic psychology as well as his development of the hierarchy of human needs, a theory of psychological health predicated on fulfilling innate human needs in priority, culminating in a state of self-actualisation.

Maslow's career in psychology predated the positive psychology movement. However, it likely wouldn't look the same had it not been for his efforts.

This workbook will explore Maslow's formative life experiences, his main contributions to psychology, and his work's relationship to the positive psychology movement of the 20th century.

MASLOW'S EARLY LIFE, EDUCATION, AND LIFE EXPERIENCES

Maslow was born in N.Y. back in April 1908. He studied psychology and Gestalt psychology at the University of Wisconsin and the New School for Social Research. He was initially interested in philosophy in his teenage years, but soon became frustrated with "all the talking that didn't get him or anyone anywhere". In response to his frustration, Maslow switched his focus to psychology, which he felt was more relevant to 20th-century life.

Maslow was initially attracted to the school of behaviourism in psychology thought but quickly rejected it to redirect his focus onto understanding what governed behaviour (humanism). Maslow considered himself a 'timid person' when he first started his studies. He even attributed his interest in self-actualisation and the optimisation of the human experience to this timidity (in part).

It wasn't until World War II that the horrors of war motivated Maslow with a sense of urgency that pivoted his focus towards understanding human motivation and the human capacity to self-actualise. Maslow's research interests were underpinned by his own personal and shared experiences, which helps explain his transformative contributions to the social sciences.

THE SCHOOL OF HUMANISTIC PSYCHOLOGY

Not long after Maslow launched his career in psychology, he became frustrated with the established 'powerhouses' of psychology at that time, which were psychoanalysis (from the works of Sigmund Freud) and behavioural psychology (from Pavlov and B.F. Skinner among others). Maslow recognised that psychoanalysis focused too much on the past (where people had come from) and not enough on the future (where people were going). He thus contributed to the third 'powerhouse' of psychology that evolved in response to this frustration: the humanistic school of psychological thought.



ABRAHAM MASLOW'S CONTRIBUTIONS TO HUMANISTIC PSYCHOLOGY

Humanistic psychology quickly grew in influence for its appreciation of the human experience. One of these influencing factors was the Gestalt-influenced idea that human beings are 'more than just the sum of their parts'. From this understanding, humanity should take more time understanding the parts of a person (history, actions, behaviours and also motivations).

This idea gave birth to Maslow's main contribution to humanistic psychology (and the schools of psychological thought in general), his theory of motivation that centred around our human hierarchy of needs.

Aside from developing the motivational hierarchy of needs, Maslow also co-founded the Journal of Humanistic Psychology (J.H.P.) in 1961 with Anthony Sutich from SAGE Publishing. Maslow cofounded the Journal of Transpersonal Psychology in 1969, and by publishing these two influential journals within the field of modern psychology, he ensured that his name would outlast his famous hierarchy of needs.

MASLOW'S HIERARCHY OF HUMAN NEEDS

In his influential paper, A Theory of Human Motivation, Maslow proposed that human beings have a certain number of motivational needs which are arranged in a hierarchy with some of these needs being more primitive or basic than others.

The hierarchy of human needs stemmed from Maslow's belief that, "the fundamental desires of human beings are similar despite the multitude of conscious desires" (Zalenski & Raspa, 2006).

In A Theory of Human Motivation, Maslow describes his hierarchy of needs as being five core sets of requirements that motivate and drive human behaviour, which is; physiological, safety, social, egotistical and self-actualising. He then arranged these needs in a pyramidal, with physiological needs making up the foundation of the pyramid and self-actualisation peaking at the top.

In other words, our physiological set of human needs are often the most important to people and will 'monopolise conscious decision making' until they have all been met. Once a level of requirement has been reached, we naturally progress on to pursuing a higher level, and so on until we have self-actualised (discovered, realised and fully accepted ourselves). According to Maslow, this meant that the average human is commonly partially satisfied and unsatisfied in all of his wants, all of the time" (Maslow, 1943).

While humanistic psychology has passed its peak of social influence, Maslow's hierarchy is still a significant, well-established aspect of modern applied psychology. Recent psychological studies suggest that Maslow's hierarchy of needs has influenced modern psychology in ways that he may not even have initially predicted.



ABRAHAM MASLOW'S CONTRIBUTIONS TO HUMANISTIC PSYCHOLOGY

"A person who makes full use of his talents, potentialities, and capacities fulfils himself by doing the best he is capable of doing. The self-actualised person must find those qualities that make his life rich and rewarding. He must find meaningfulness, self-sufficiency, individuality and truth." - Abraham Maslow

SELF-TRANSCENDENCE

Transcendence refers to one's spirituality and relation to the universe and others. This need is specifically concerned with the act of helping others to self-actualise.

SELF-ACTUALISATION

This stage can only be met once all other needs are satisfied. Though any person can achieve self-actualisation, not all people will, since progress may be halted by life's challenges.

AESTHETIC NEEDS

This refers to the search for beauty, balance, and form. Maslow recognised that artists tended to focus on fulfilment of these needs.

COGNITIVE NEEDS

A person's cognitive needs may be fulfilled by the pursuit of knowledge.

SELF-ESTEEM

A person's self-esteem needs are often met as they achieve goals, master certain tasks, and receive recognition or respect for accomplishments.

BELONGING NEEDS

These include love and community and are generally met by family, friends, or romantic partners.

SAFETY NEEDS

Safety includes feelings of security and stability, living free of fear, and being safe from harm.

PHYSIOLOGICAL NEEDS

These essential needs include food, water, and shelter. Most people attempt to fulfil these needs before any others.



ABRAHAM MASLOW'S CONTRIBUTIONS TO HUMANISTIC PSYCHOLOGY

WHAT DOES ABRAHAM MASLOW HAVE TO DO WITH POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY?

According to humanistic psychologist N. Goud, "the recent Positive Psychology movement focuses on themes addressed by Abraham Maslow over 50 years ago" (Goud, 2008). Goud also suggested in more than one of his articles "that Maslow encouraged positive psychology for the advancement of human happiness, flow, courage, hope and optimism, responsibility, and civility".

More than anything else, Maslow (alongside other proponents of positive psychology) are driven by the notion that the traditional schools of psychology have abandoned seeking to understand the overall human experience in favour of defining the complexities of what is and isn't a mental illness (Rathunde, 2001).

It is evident that many modern psychological thinkers are concerned with similar parts of the human experience as what Maslow was. To many psychologists who have studied the works of Maslow, optimising the well-being of a healthy person is equally as crucial as normalising the welfare of a person who is not yet grounded within themselves. This is one core idea which Maslow helped legitimise within the field of psychology.

IN SUMMARY

Despite initially being interested in philosophy, Abraham Maslow first entered the world of psychology through the school of behaviourism. Before long, his frustration with the limitations of behaviourism led him to assist in the development of humanistic psychology by contributing his hierarchy of needs. This hierarchy of needs is as relevant today as what it was over 50 years ago.

Maslow's motivational theory lets us know ourselves better. Human needs are common to all. However, we all have personal motivations that we need to understand if we are to meet them.

Maslow died in Menlo Park, California, on June 8, 1970. His works still fascinate learners all over the world today.

"If you plan on being anything less than you are capable of being, you will probably be unhappy all the days of your life." - Abraham Maslow, 1961.

